



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on  
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

## Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

## Second Sunday of Lent C



Transfiguration of Christ, c. 1480, oil, 116 x 154 cm, Galleria Nazionale di Capodimonte,  
Nápoly Bellini, Giovanni (1426-1516)



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

### Prayer in Preparation for Baptism and in Preparation for Renewing Baptismal Promises

Almighty God, who rules all things,  
we hasten with eager steps to the venerable font of eternal salvation,  
and ask you, Magnificent God,  
that you command this font which has been sealed  
may be reopened with the keys of your mercy,  
and impart to those that thirst a most sweet cup of water.  
May the voice of your divinity sound upon these waters,  
may the Spirit of your sanctification dwell therein  
and bring healing to all ills.  
May the abundant streams of paradise flow from it,  
that by your goodness heavenly graces  
may be bestowed upon these new-born children.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Liber Ordium. *Monumenta Ecclesiae Liturgica*, edd. Cabrol and Leclercq, Vol. 5, ed. Dom M. Ferotin, Paris, 1904.

**Catholic  
Faith, Life  
& Creed**  
Version 2.0

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Breaking Open the  
Word worksheets  
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Faith, Life, & Creed*  
Doctrinal Sessions.

Editor: Bill Huebsch

Published cooperatively by  
TeamRCIA.com and  
PastoralPlanning.com.

## Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today is the second Sunday of Lent. God entered into a ritual of assurance with Abraham who became the father of a great nation.
- ▶ The final and ultimate covenant ritual was made through Jesus Christ and the sacrifice of the cross that is foreshadowed in today's liturgy.
- ▶ Many parishes celebrate the penitential rite for baptized Christians on the Second Sunday of Lent.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings. (You may want to concentrate on the Gospel alone.)

## First reading: Genesis 15, 5-12

- ▶ God entered into a covenant relationship with Abraham, the great man of faith, promising his legacy would last for all generations.
- ▶ Today we are reminded of the covenant forged between God and Abraham.
- ▶ God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation and that his legacy would span the generations.
- ▶ God also promised them a land to call their own—the Promised Land.
- ▶ God sealed the covenant with a liturgy.
- ▶ Abraham demonstrated extraordinary faith and God was true to his promise.
- ▶ Today's reading signals the making of a people in covenant relationship with their God.
- ▶ Abraham mourned the fact that he had no heir and no one to care for him in his old age.
- ▶ God assured him that he would have a child to carry on his name and who would care for him. Sarah was very old yet Abraham had faith in God's promise to him. He had exemplary faith. God was true to his word and Sarah bore a child in her old age.
- ▶ The covenant liturgy God and Abraham entered into served as a contractual agreement between both parties. The slaughter of animals was used to seal contracts in the ancient world. The death of the animal was intended to demonstrate the fate of any one of the parties who did not live up to the contractual agreement. This liturgy reflects the serious nature of the covenant God made with Abraham. Woe to anyone who dare break the covenant.
- ▶ Only God passed by the animal parts—not Abraham. Thus, making God solely responsible for the covenant.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of Two, then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- Imagine the faith of Abraham. He believed the unbelievable on God’s word alone. He trusted. Have you ever been put in a situation where you were invited to have similar faith? What did your experience teach you about the nature of faith?

### Second Reading: Philippians 3, 17-4, 1

- Paul tells his Philippians’ community that when Christ returns they would be gloriously transformed.
- Paul set out to convert the western cities. His beloved Philippians community supported his mission. Paul reminded the Philippians’ believers that one day their earthly bodies would be transformed at the Parousia.
- Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians from a jail cell. His letter was filled with joy and gratitude. Paul considered his predicament as nothing in light of the great gift of salvation won through Christ Jesus.
- Paul insisted that faithful believers were citizens of heaven while still existing in this earthly realm. He reminds his beloved Philippians that Jesus would soon return and all believers would experience transformation. They would receive new glorified bodies and a new nature in Christ. His letter was chosen for its obvious connection to the transfiguration of Christ in the Gospel.
- Paul encouraged his beloved community to persevere.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, surface brief insights in wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- What does it mean to you that you are a citizen of heaven? What are the implications for your life?



## Gospel: Luke 9, 28-36

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

### Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
  
- ▶ Jesus is transfigured in glory before his disciples, Peter, James and John.
- ▶ Several traditions of Moses and Elijah are read into the interpretation of events surrounding them today. One tradition held that both did not die, but were taken into the afterlife and would return at the beginning of the messianic age. Another tradition insists that they represent the Law and Prophets. They leave the scene at Mount Tabor making way for Jesus (who is the fulfillment of the Old Testament) to inaugurate the new age. Believers were now to center their lives on Christ—not the Law and the Prophets.
- ▶ One scholar suggests that the transfiguration scene on Mount Tabor was a turning point for Jesus and his mission. Jesus knew he was at a crossroad. He was on the way to Jerusalem. He knew what was waiting for him in Jerusalem. Yet there were still so many people who were still searching for God in Galilee. Should he stay and continue his mission or forge onward to Jerusalem, the seat of religious authority? The scene on Mount Tabor was as much for Jesus as it was for his disciples. He did what he always did in his ministry—he turned to his Father in prayer.
- ▶ The Mount Tabor encounter with his Father reminded him of the glory he came from and the glory to which he would return. God prepared him for the ordeal ahead.
- ▶ Jesus had an awakening. His face changed in appearance—the look of someone who had a profound insight. Scripture is filled with stories of people’s faces that changed as a result of a profound manifestation of God or awareness or insight. All of a sudden his mission was clearly laid before him. His earthly mission was finished. He had inaugurated the reign he came to establish. He now had to bring it to completion. He understood what he was about to endure.
- ▶ The scene was also for the benefit of the disciples. They would look back on it and remember with awe what they had witnessed and they too would be fortified to forge onward into whatever Jerusalem God was calling them.
- ▶ The oh-so-human Peter was so struck by the theophany he was witnessing that he wanted to pitch a tent and stay where he was—to bask in the glory to which he was a privileged witness.
- ▶ The point of this story is that we can never simply stay put and bask in the

comfortable—we are called to enjoy the moment and then courageously take up our cross and follow Christ.

- ▶ This Gospel brings us back to the inauguration of Jesus' public ministry. The *Voice* from heaven affirms his beloved Son—the same *Voice* at Jesus' baptism. The *Voice* reminds us of whom Jesus is and what he was sent to accomplish. All has been fulfilled; he has only to go to Jerusalem to complete his mission.
- ▶ Luke affords his reader the privilege of sharing the intimacy between Father and Son—an intimacy in which we are all invited to share. Jesus prayed his way through towns, villages, hamlets and cities. He gave us a glimpse of the source of his intimacy with his Father—prayer and intimate communion. Such was the source of Jesus' power; such is the source of ours.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example.

- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ Have you ever had an “a-ha” moment of insight—awareness—of how God was asking you to do in response to a certain situation? What did you learn from the experience?
- ▶ Have you ever been in a situation that you simply did not want to leave because it was so wonderful—you simply wanted to stay put and enjoy the moment? What are some challenges that God might be calling you to address or ministry he might be calling you to once you climb down your own Mount Tabor?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

## Concluding Prayer

Option 1. Celebrate a minor rite—an exorcism or blessing for catechumens: RCIA 90-97

Option 2. Pray the Prayer of Pope Clement

Option 3. Other suitable, but brief prayer. (Perhaps pray the Prayer of St. Francis.)

## APPENDIX

#1. Faith sounds very simple. People tell us, “Just have faith,” or “Faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains.” The latter phrase illustrates that “having faith” is not as simple as it sounds. It is one thing to “have faith” and quite another to act on it. My mother was dying of emphysema. Our greatest fear was that she would be mercilessly tied to a machine for months on end and linger in a miserable existence. Our family prayed that God would make her final hours peaceful and that she would not be tied to breathing machine in her final hours. A ventilator for someone who can’t breathe is like liquor to an end stage alcoholic. The quality of life was abysmal and the patient could linger indefinitely. On one hand the patient is desperate to get off the machine, and on another it is blessed relief from the inability to breathe.

My mother had a terrible night; she crashed and was put back on the ventilator. We were devastated. Faith was teetering on the edge. However, we trusted that God would be faithful to this incredible woman of faith and ease her final suffering. One of the greatest privileges of my life was to preside at her ritual of *letting go*. I held her hand, and together we prayed her off that machine with mantras that invoked the Light of Christ. We asked the Holy Spirit to breathe for her...and indeed the Spirit did just that. For her to get off that machine in those final hours was nothing short of miraculous. God was faithful to her and to us. She died peacefully in her sleep the next evening. I learned that faith is not as easy as it sounds—that it is not just a head-trip, but sometimes we must act on it and trust God to do the rest.

2. If I am a citizen of heaven it changes the way I approach this life. A citizen of heaven does not spend time worrying about earthly concerns. Such a citizen responds to life situations by living the Serenity Prayer: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.” This is not easy to live and requires diligence and the perseverance Paul insists we must have. If I keep my eye on the prize and the future glory I will be less concerned with things of this world—with material goods, with power, privilege and prestige.

My dear friend forgot to keep her eye on the prize. She forgot she was a citizen of heaven. She embezzled money, and murdered the person who could bring evidence against her. She then took her own life. She forgot the prize that lay ahead of her. Her desire for the material goods of this world lured her into a trap of her own making. Her tragedy is a constant reminder to me that I could just as easily lose sight of my proud citizenship and lose my way as well. Paul’s exhortation to persevere has serious implications for our lives.

3. One of the most amazing “a-ha” moments of my life occurred when I came to the realization that I was powerless over a situation in my life. I knew that I could

do no more on my own power. I had to truly let go and trust God to work things out. It was the most freeing moment of my life. I knew what I had to do. It required complete trust and faith that God would take over. God did take over. The situation worked itself out far better than had I manipulated and maneuvered one more time to no avail.

As far as staying in a comfortable place is concerned: I ministered in my last parish for seventeen years. It was time to move on. I was very comfortable, but I was stagnating. I was afraid of the prospects of moving. Fear of the unknown was intense yet I knew God was calling me to a new ministry. My initial response was to stay put, to delay, to procrastinate and decide not to decide. My life had gotten easy, the work was routine and prospects for growth were slim. I knew I was called to take the leap no matter how difficult.

The first year was terribly difficult, but the decision is the best decision I could have made. God was faithful. My ministry has borne great fruit in my new parish. Initially all I could see was the pain of change. Today I am thankful for God's invitation to grow in ways I never could have imagined. I have been given the privilege of ministering in an amazing parish with wonderful people who have become my family.





## Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

*Prayer*  
*Sin and Grace*  
*Cross of Christ*

*Sacrament of Reconciliation*  
*Faith*  
*Eschatology: Heaven, Hell, Purgatory*

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the index of doctrinal topics and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

### **PRAYER**

The story of Transfiguration is a story of the intimacy between Jesus and his Father. We are all invited to share that same intimacy. Lent is a time we focus on the discipline of prayer and recommit to be more diligent in our prayer efforts. Today's session will focus on PRAYER.

### **SIN AND GRACE**

Today's Gospel is reminder of the glory that awaits us—the grace we all share. It is also a reminder of why Jesus had to make that final journey to Jerusalem—the sins of the world. Today's extended session will focus on the Church's teaching regarding SIN AND GRACE.

### **CROSS OF CHRIST**

Jesus is transfigured; his clothes become brilliantly white. He is prepared for the passage he will make from death to life once he forges onward to Jerusalem and the cross that awaited him. Today's session will address the Cross of Christ.

### **SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION**

Lent is a time we focus on the areas of sin in our lives and our need for God's mercy. It is also a time when the church offers multiple opportunities to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. Jesus was prepared for the ordeal he would soon be facing—an ordeal caused by human sinfulness. The sacrament of reconciliation extends God's mercy and the reconciling presence of Christ. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION.

## FAITH

The story of Abraham is a story of faith. He reminds us of the power of faith. Abraham had faith in God in the face of the impossible. Thus, today's doctrinal session will focus on FAITH.

## ESCHATOLOGY: heaven, hell, purgatory

Jesus is reminded of the glory he would be entering into and from which he came. It is a glory to which all believers are heirs, insists St. Paul. Today's extended doctrinal session will focus on the church's teaching regarding the after life-heaven, hell and purgatory under the title Eschatology (*end things*).